THE

WORKING OF THE AMERICAN DEMOCRACY.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE FRATERNITY Φ B K

OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY,

JUNE 28, 1888.

BY CHARLES W. ELIOT.

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I PURPOSE to examine some parts of the experience of the American Democracy, with the intention of suggesting the answers to certain theoretical objections which have been urged against democracy in general, and of showing in part what makes the strength of the democratic form of government.

For more than a hundred years there has been among civilized nations a decided set of opinion towards democratic institutions; but in Europe this set has been determined rather by unfavorable experience of despotic and oligarchic forms of government, than by any favorable experience of the democratic form. Government by one, and government by a few have been tried through many centuries, by different races of men, and under all sorts of conditions; but neither has ever succeeded, — not even in England, — in producing a reasonably peaceful, secure, and also happy society. No lesson upon this subject could be more forcible than that which modern Europe teaches. Empires and monarchies, like patriarchies and chieftainships, have doubtless served their turn; but they have signally failed to realize the social ideals — some ancient and some modern in origin — which have taken firm hold of men's minds since the American Revolution. This failure extends through all society, from top to bottom. It is as conspicuous in the moral condition of the upper classes as in the material condition of

the lower. Oligarchies call themselves aristocracies; but government by the few has never really been government by the best. Therefore mankind tends to seek the realization of its ideals in broad-based forms of government.

It can hardly be said that Europe has any experience of democracy which is applicable to a modern State. Gallant little Switzerland lives in a mountain fastness, and exists by the sufferance of powerful neighbors, each jealous of the other. No lessons for modern use can be drawn from the transient city democracies of ancient or mediæval times. The city as a unit of government-organization has gone forever, with the glories of Athens, Rome, and Florence. Throughout this century a beneficent tendency has been manifested towards the formation of great national units. Witness the expansion of Russia and the United States, the creation of the German empire, the union of Austria, Hungary, and Bohemia, and the unification of Italy. At least within these great units prevail a common peace and an unrestricted trade. The blessings which result from holding vast territories and multitudes under one national government are so great that none but large governments have any future before them. To succeed, democracy must show itself able to control both territory and population on a continental scale. Therefore its methods must be representative, — which means that they are necessarily deliberative, and are likely to be conservative and slow. Of such government by the many Europe has no trustworthy experience, either in ancient or in modern times. The so-called democracies of Greece and Rome were really governments by a small caste of free citizens ruling a multitude of aliens and slaves: hasty and tyrannical themselves, they naturally prepared the way for tyrants. Yet when all the world were slaves, that caste of free citizens was a wonderful invention. France, since the Revolution, has exhibited some fugitive specimens of democratic rule, but has had no stable government of any sort, whether tyranny, oligarchy, or democracy. In short, such experience as Europe has had of so-called democracies — with the exception of admirable

Switzerland — is worse than useless; for it is thoroughly misleading, and has misled many acute observers of political phenomena.

In this absence of available European experience, where can mankind look for trustworthy evidence concerning the practical working of democratic institutions? Solely to the United States. The Australasian colonies will before long contribute valuable evidence; but at present their population is small, and their experience is too recent to be of great value to students of comparative politics. Yet it is upon experience, and experience alone, that safe conclusions can be based concerning the merits and the faults of democracy. On politics, speculative writing — even by able men like Sir George Cornewall Lewis and Sir Henry Maine — is as perilous as it is on biology; and prophecy is still more dangerous. To the modern mind, ideal States like Plato's Republic, Sir Thomas More's Utopia, and Saint Augustine's Civitas Dei, are utterly uninteresting, — particularly when they rest upon such visionary postulates as community of goods and community of wives and children. The stable State must have its roots in use and wont, in familiar customs and laws, and in the inherited habits of successive generations. But it is only in the United States that a well-rooted democracy upon a great scale has ever existed; and hence the importance of accurate observation and just judgment of the working of American democratic institutions, both political and social. Upon the success of those institutions rest the best hopes of the world.

In discussing some parts of our national experience I intend to confine myself to moral and intellectual phenomena, and shall have little to say about the material prosperity of the country. The rapid growth of the United States in population, wealth, and everything which constitutes material strength is, indeed, marvellous; but this concomitant of the existence of democratic institutions in a fertile land, rich also in minerals, ores, oil, and gas, has often been dilated upon, and may be dismissed with only two remarks: first, that a great

deal of moral vigor has been put into the material development of the United States; and secondly, that wide-spread comfort ought to promote rather than to hinder the civilizing of a people. Sensible and righteous government ought ultimately to make a nation rich; and although this proposition cannot be directly reversed, yet diffused well-being, comfort, and material prosperity establish a fair presumption in favor of the government and the prevailing social conditions under which these blessings have been secured.

The first question I wish to deal with is a fundamental one: How wisely, and by what process, has the American people made up its mind upon public questions of supreme difficulty and importance? Not how will it, or how might it, make up its mind; but how has it made up its mind? It is commonly said that the multitude, being ignorant and untrained, cannot reach so wise a conclusion upon questions of state as the cultivated few; that the wisdom of a mass of men can only be an average wisdom at the best; and that democracy, which in things material levels up, in things intellectual and moral levels down. Even De Tocqueville says that there is a middling standard of knowledge in a democracy, to which some rise and others descend. Let us put these speculative opinions, which have so plausible a sound, in contrast with American facts.

The people of this country have had three supreme questions to settle within the last hundred and thirty years: first, the question of independence of Great Britain; secondly, the question of forming a firm federal union; and thirdly, the question of maintaining that union at whatever cost of blood and treasure. In the decision of these questions, four generations of men took active part. The first two questions were settled by a population mainly English; but when the third was decided, the foreign admixture was already considerable. That graver or more far-reaching political problems could be presented to any people, it is impossible to imagine. Everybody can now see that in each case the only wise decision was arrived at by the multitude, in spite of difficulties

and dangers which many contemporary statesmen and publicists of our own and other lands thought insuperable. It is quite the fashion to laud to the skies the second of these three great achievements of the American democracy; but the creation of the Federal Union, regarded as a wise determination of a multitude of voters, was certainly not more remarkable than the other two. No government — tyranny or oligarchy, despotic or constitutional — could possibly have made wiser decisions or executed them more resolutely, as the event has proved in each of the three cases mentioned.

So much for the wisdom of these great resolves. Now, by what process were they arrived at?

In each case the process was slow, covering many years during which discussion and debate went on in pulpits, legislatures, public meetings, newspapers, and books. The best minds of the country took part in these prolonged debates. Party passions were aroused; advocates on each side disputed before the people; the authority of recognized political leaders was invoked; public spirit and selfish interest were appealed to; and that vague but powerful sentiment called love of country, felt equally by high and low, stirred men's hearts and lit the intellectual combat with lofty emotion. In presence of such a protracted discussion, a multitude of interested men make up their minds just as one interested man does. They listen, compare what they hear with their own experience, consider the bearings of the question on their own interests, and consult their self-respect, their hopes, and their fears. Not one in a thousand of them could originate, or even state with precision, the arguments he hears; not one in a thousand could give a clear account of his own observations, processes of thought, and motives of action upon the subject, — but the collective judgment is informed and guided by the keener wits and stronger wills, and the collective wisdom is higher and surer in guiding public conduct than that of one mind or of several superior minds uninstructed by million-eyed observation and million-tongued debate.

In all three of the great popular decisions under considera-

tion, most remarkable discernment, patience, and resolution were, as a fact, displayed. If these were the average qualities of the many, then the average mental and moral powers of the multitude suffice for greatest deeds; if they were the qualities of the superior few infused into the many by speech and press, by exhortation, example, and leadership, even then the assertion that the operative opinions of the unlearned mass on questions of state must necessarily be foolish, their honesty only an ordinary honesty, and their sentiments vulgar, falls to the ground. The multitude, it would seem, either can distil essential wisdom from a seething mass of heterogeneous evidence and opinion, or can be inspired, like a single individual, from without and above itself. If the practical wisdom of the multitude in action be attributed to the management or to the influence of a sagacious few, the wise result proves that these leaders were well chosen by some process of natural selection, instead of being designated, as in an oligarchy, by the inheritance of artificial privileges.

It is fair to say that one reason why democratic decisions of great public questions are apt to turn out well, and therefore to seem to posterity to have been wise, is, that the state of the public mind and will is an all-important factor in determining the issue of such questions. Democracy vigorously executing its own purpose demonstrates by the issue its wisdom before the event. Indeed, this is one of the most legitimate and important advantages of the democratic form of government.

There is a limited sense in which it is true that in the United States the average man predominates; but the political ideas which have predominated in the United States, and therefore in the mind and will of the average man,—equality before the law, national independence, federation, and indissoluble union,— are ideas not of average, but of superlative merit. It is also true that the common school and the newspaper echo received opinion, and harp on moral commonplaces. But unfortunately there are many accepted humane opinions and ethical commonplaces which have never yet

been embodied in national legislation, — much less in international law, — and which may therefore still be repeated to some advantage. If that comprehensive commonplace, "Ye are all members one of another," could be realized in international relations, there would be an end of war and industrial isolation.

Experience has shown that democracy must not be expected to decide wisely about things in which it feels no immediate concern. Unless its interests are affected or its sentiments touched, it will not take the pains necessary to arrive at just conclusions. To engage public attention sufficiently to procure legislation, is the reformer's chief difficulty in a democracy. Questions of war, peace, or human rights, and questions which concern the national unity, dignity, or honor, win the attention of the many. Indeed, the greatest political questions are precisely those in which the many have concern; for they suffer the penalties of discord, war, and public wrong-doing. But it is curiously difficult to secure from multitudes of voters effective dealing with questions which relate merely to taxation, expenditure, administration, trade, or manufactures. On these lesser matters the multitude will not declare itself until evils multiply intolerably. We need not be surprised, however, that the intelligence and judgment of the multitude can be brought into play only when they think their own interests are to be touched. All experience, both ancient and modern, shows that when the few rule they do not attend to the interests of the many.

I shall next consider certain forms of mental and moral activity which the American democracy demands of hundreds of thousands of the best citizens, but which are without parallel in despotic and oligarchic States. I refer to the widely diffused and ceaseless activity which maintains, first, the immense Federal Union with all its various sub-divisions into States, counties, and towns; secondly, the voluntary system in religion; and thirdly, the voluntary system in the higher instruction.

To have carried into successful practice on a great scale the federative principle, which binds many semi-independent States into one Nation, is a good work done for all peoples. Federation promises to counteract the ferocious quarrelsomeness of mankind, and to abolish the jealousy of trade; but its price in mental labor and moral initiative is high. It is a system which demands not only vital force at the heart of the State, but a diffused vitality in every part. In a despotic government the intellectual and moral force of the whole organism radiates from the central seat of power; in a federal union political vitality must be diffused throughout the whole organism, as animal heat is developed and maintained in every molecule of the entire body. The success of the United States as a federal union has been and is effected by the watchfulness, industry, and public spirit of millions of men who spend in that noble cause the greater part of their leisure, and of the mental force which can be spared from bread-winning occupations. The costly expenditure goes on without ceasing all over the country, wherever citizens come together to attend to the affairs of the village, town, county, or State. This is the price of liberty and union. The well-known promptness and skill of Americans in organizing a new community result from the fact that hundreds of thousands of Americans — and their fathers before them — have had practice in managing public affairs. To get this practice costs time, labor, and vitality, which in a despotic or oligarchic State are seldom spent in this direction.

The successful establishment and support of religious institutions, — churches, seminaries, and religious charities, — upon a purely voluntary system, is another unprecedented achievement of the American democracy. In only three generations American democratic society has effected the complete separation of Church and State, a reform which no other people has ever attempted. Yet religious institutions are not stinted in the United States; on the contrary, they abound and thrive, and all alike are protected and encour aged, but not supported, by the State. Who has taken up

the work which the State has relinquished? Somebody has had to do it, for the work is done. Who provides the money to build churches, pay salaries, conduct missions, and educate ministers? Who supplies the brains for organizing and maintaining these various activities? This is the work, not of a few officials, but of millions of intelligent and devoted men and women scattered through all the villages and cities of the broad land. The maintenance of churches, seminaries, and charities by voluntary contributions and by the administrative labors of volunteers, implies an enormous and incessant expenditure of mental and moral force. It is a force which must ever be renewed from generation to generation; for it is a personal force, constantly expiring, and as constantly to be replaced. Into the maintenance of the voluntary system in religion has gone a good part of the moral energy which three generations have been able to spare from the work of getting a living; but it is worth the sacrifice, and will be accounted in history one of the most remarkable feats of American public spirit and faith in freedom.

A similar exhibition of diffused mental and moral energy has accompanied the establishment and the development of a system of higher instruction in the United States, with no inheritance of monastic endowments, and no gifts from royal or ecclesiastical personages disposing of great resources derived from the State, and with but scanty help from the public purse. Whoever is familiar with the colleges and universities of the United States knows that the creation of these democratic institutions has cost the life-work of thousands of devoted men. At the sacrifice of other aspirations, and under heavy discouragements and disappointments, but with faith and hope, these teachers and trustees have built up institutions, which, however imperfect, have cherished scientific enthusiasm, fostered piety, literature, and art, maintained the standards of honor and public duty, and steadily kept in view the ethical ideals which democracy cherishes. It has been a popular work, to which large numbers of people in successive generations have contributed of their

substance or of their labor. The endowment of institutions of education, including libraries and museums, by private persons in the United States is a phenomenon without precedent or parallel, and is a legitimate effect of democratic institutions. Under a tyranny — were it that of a Marcus Aurelius — or an oligarchy — were it as enlightened as that which now rules Germany — such a phenomenon would be simply impossible. The University of Strasburg was lately established by an imperial decree, and is chiefly maintained out of the revenue of the State. Harvard University has been two hundred and fifty years in growing to its present stature, and is even now inferior at many points to the new University of Strasburg; but Harvard is the creation of thousands of persons, living and dead, rich and poor, learned and simple, who have voluntarily given it their time, thought, or money, and lavished upon it their affection; Strasburg exists by the mandate of the ruling few directing upon it a part of the product of ordinary taxation. Like the voluntary system in religion, the voluntary system in the higher education buttresses democracy; each demands from the community a large outlay of intellectual activity and moral vigor.

There is another direction in which the people of the United States have spent and are now spending a vast amount of intellectual and moral energy, — a direction not, as in the three cases just considered, absolutely peculiar to the American republic, but still highly characteristic of democracy. I mean the service of corporations. Within the last hundred years the American people have invented a new and large application of the ancient principle of incorporation. We are so accustomed to corporations as indispensable agents in carrying on great public works and services, and great industrial or financial operations, that we forget the very recent development of the corporation with limited liability as a common business agent. Prior to 1789 there were only two corporations for business purposes in Massachusetts. The English general statute

which provides for incorporation with limited liability dates only from 1855. No other nation has made such general or such successful use of corporate powers as the American,—and for the reason that the method is essentially a democratic method, suitable for a country in which great individual or family properties are rare, and small properties are numerous. Freedom of incorporation makes possible great combinations of small capitals, and while winning the advantages of concentrated management, permits diffused ownership. These merits have been quickly understood and turned to account by the American democracy. The service of many corporations has become even more important than the service of the several States of the Union. The managers of great companies have trusts reposed in them which are matched only in the highest executive offices of the nation; and they are relatively free from the numerous checks and restrictions under which the highest national officials must always act. The activity of corporations, great and small, penetrates every part of the industrial and social body, and their daily maintenance brings into play more mental and moral force than the maintenance of all the governments on the continent combined.

These propositions can easily be illustrated by actual examples. I find established at Boston, for instance, the headquarters of a railroad corporation which employs eighteen thousand persons, has gross receipts of about $40,000,000 a year, and on occasion pays its best-paid officer a salary of $35,000. I find there also the central office of a manufacturing establishment which employs more than six thousand persons, has a gross annual income of more than $7,000,000, and pays its best-paid officer $20,000 a year. The gross receipts of the Pennsylvania railroad system are $115,000,000 a year, the highest-paid official of the company receives a salary of $30,000, and the whole system employs one hundred thousand men. A comparison of such figures with the corresponding figures for the prosperous and respectable Commonwealth of Massachusetts is not uninstructive. The gross

receipts of the Commonwealth are about $7,000,000 a year, the highest salary it pays is $6,500, and there are not more than six thousand persons in its employ for any considerable part of the year.

In the light of such facts it is easy to see some of the reasons why American corporations command the services of men of high capacity and character, who in other countries or in earlier times would have been in the service of the State. In American democratic society corporations supplement the agencies of the State, and their functions have such importance in determining conditions of labor, diffusing comfort and general well-being among millions of people, and utilizing innumerable large streams and little rills of capital, that the upper grades of their service are reached by merit, are filled as a rule upon a tenure during good behavior and efficiency, are well paid, and have great dignity and consideration. Of the enormous material benefits which have resulted from the American extension of the principle of incorporation I need say nothing. I wish only to point out that freedom of incorporation, though no longer exclusively a democratic agency, has given strong support to democratic institutions; and that a great wealth of intellect, energy, and fidelity is devoted to the service of corporations by their officers and directors.

The four forms of mental and moral activity which I have been considering, — that which maintains political vitality throughout the Federal Union; that which supports unsubsidized religious institutions; that which develops the higher instruction in the arts and sciences, and trains men for all the professions; and that which is applied to the service of corporations, — all illustrate the educating influence of democratic institutions, an influence which foreign observers are apt to overlook or underestimate. The ballot is not the only political institution which has educated the American democracy. Democracy is a training-school in which multitudes learn in many ways to take thought for others, to exercise public functions, and to bear public responsibilities.

So many critics of the theory of democracy have maintained that a democratic government would be careless of public obligations, and unjust towards private property, that it will be interesting to inquire what a century of American experience indicates upon this important point. Has there been any disposition on the part of the American democracy to create exaggerated public debts, to throw the burden of public debts on posterity rather than on the present generation, or to favor in legislation the poorer sort as against the richer, the debtor as against the creditor ?

The answer to these questions is not doubtful. With the exception of the sudden creation of the great national debt occasioned by the Civil War, the American communities have been very moderate in borrowing, the State debts being for the most part insignificant, and the city debts far below the English standard. Moreover, these democratic communities, with a few local and temporary exceptions, pay their public debts more promptly than any State under the rule of a despot or a class has ever done. The government of the United States has once paid the whole of its public debt, and is in a fair way to perform that feat again. So much for democratic treatment of public obligations.

It is conceivable, however, that the popular masses should think it for their own interest to keep down and pay off public indebtedness, and yet should discriminate in legislation in favor of the majority who are not well off, and against the minority who are. There are two points, and only two points, so far as I know, at which permanent American legislation has, as a fact, intentionally discriminated in favor of the poor. The several States, as a rule, exempt from taxation household effects and personal property to a moderate amount, and the tools of farmers and mechanics. The same articles and a few others like them are also commonly exempted from attachment for debt, together often with a homestead not exceeding in value one thousand dollars. The exemptions from attachment, and even those from taxation, will cover all the property of many poor persons and families; yet this legislation

is humane and worthy of respect, being analogous to the common provision which exempts from all taxation persons who by reason of age or infirmity may, in the judgment of the assessors, be unable to contribute to the public charges. It is intended to prevent cases of hardship in the collection either of taxes or of debts; and doubtless the exemptions from attachment are designed also to leave to the debtor a fair chance of recovery.

After observing the facts of a full century, one may therefore say of the American democracy that it has contracted public debt with moderation, paid it with unexampled promptness, acquired as good a public credit as the world has ever known, made private property secure, and shown no tendency to attack riches or to subsidize poverty, or in either direction to violate the fundamental principle of democracy, that all men are equal before the law. The significance of these facts is prodigious. They mean that, as regards private property and its security, a government by the many, for the many, is more to be trusted than any other form of government; and that as regards public indebtedness, an experienced democracy is more likely to exhibit just sentiments and practical good judgment than an oligarchy or a tyranny.

An argument against democracy, which evidently had great weight with Sir Henry Maine, because he supposed it to rest upon the experience of mankind, is stated as follows: Progress and reformation have always been the work of the few, and have been opposed by the many; therefore democracies will be obstructive. This argument is completely refuted by the first century of the American democracy, alike in the field of morals and jurisprudence, and in the field of manufactures and trade. Nowhere, for instance, has the great principle of religious toleration been so thoroughly put in practice as in the United States; nowhere have such well-meant and persistent efforts been made to improve the legal status of women; nowhere has the conduct of hospitals, asylums, reformatories, and prisons been more carefully studied; nowhere have legisla-

tive remedies for acknowledged abuses and evils been more promptly and perseveringly sought. There was a certain plausibility in the idea that the multitude, who live by labor in established modes, would be opposed to inventions which would inevitably cause industrial revolutions; but American experience completely upsets this notion. For promptness in making physical forces and machinery do the work of men, the people of the United States surpass incontestably all other peoples. The people that invented and introduced with perfect commercial success the river steamboat, the cotton-gin, the parlor-car and the sleeping-car, the grain elevator, the street railway both surface and elevated, the telegraph, the telephone, the rapid printing-press, the cheap book and newspaper, the sewing-machine, the steam fire-engine, agricultural machinery, the pipe-lines for natural oil and gas, and machine-made clothing, boots, furniture, tools, screws, wagons, fire-arms, and watches, — this is not a people to vote down or hinder labor-saving invention or beneficent industrial revolution. The fact is that in a democracy the interests of the greater number will ultimately prevail, as they should. It was the stage-drivers and inn-keepers, not the multitude, who wished to suppress the locomotive; it is the publishers and the typographical unions, not the mass of the people, who wrongly imagine that they have an interest in making books dearer than they need be. Furthermore, a just liberty of combination and perfect equality before the law, such as prevail in a democracy, enable men or companies to engage freely in new undertakings at their own risk, and bring them to triumphant success, if success be in them, whether the multitude approve them or not. The consent of the multitude is not necessary to the success of a printing press which prints twenty thousand copies of a newspaper in an hour, or of a machine-cutter which cuts out twenty overcoats at one chop. In short, the notion that democracy will hinder religious, political, and social reformation and progress, or restrain commercial and industrial improvement, is a chimera.

There is another criticism of the working of democratic institutions, more formidable than the last, which the American democracy is in a fair way to dispose of. It is said that democracy is fighting against the best-determined and most peremptory of biological laws; namely, the law of heredity, with which law the social structure of monarchical and oligarchical States is in strict conformity. This criticism fails to recognize the distinction between artificial privileges transmissible without regard to inherited virtues or powers, and inheritable virtues or powers transmissible without regard to hereditary privileges. Artificial privileges will be abolished by a democracy; natural, inheritable virtues or powers are as surely transmissible under a democracy as under any other form of government. Families can be made just as enduring in a democratic as in an oligarchic State, if family permanence be desired and aimed at. The desire for the continuity of vigorous families, and for the reproduction of beauty, genius, and nobility of character is universal. "From fairest creatures we desire increase" is the commonest of sentiments. The American multitude will not take the children of distinguished persons on trust; but it is delighted when an able man has an able son, or a lovely mother a lovelier daughter. That a democracy does not prescribe the close intermarriage which characterizes a strict aristocracy, so-called, is physically not a disadvantage, but a great advantage for the freer society. The French nobility and the English House of Lords furnish good evidence that aristocracies do not succeed in perpetuating select types of intellect or of character.

In the future there will undoubtedly be seen a great increase in the number of permanent families in the United States, — families in which honor, education, and property will be transmitted with reasonable certainty; and a fair beginning has already been made. On the quinquennial catalogue of Harvard University there are about five hundred and sixty family stocks, which have been represented by graduates at intervals for at least one hundred years. On the Yale cat-

alogue there are about four hundred and twenty such family stocks; and it is probable that all other American colleges which have existed one hundred years or more show similar facts in proportion to their age and to the number of their graduates. There is nothing in American institutions to prevent this natural process from extending and continuing. The college graduate who does not send his son to college is a curious exception. American colleges are, indeed, chiefly recruited from the sons of men who were not college-bred themselves; for democratic society is mobile, and permits young men of ability to rise easily from the lower to the higher levels. But on the other hand nothing in the constitution of society forces men down who have once risen, or prevents their children and grandchildren from staying on the higher level if they have the virtue in them.

The interest in family genealogies has much increased of late years, and hundreds of thousands of persons are already recorded in printed volumes which have been compiled and published by voluntary contributions or by the zeal of individuals. In the Harvard University Library are four hundred and fifteen American family genealogies, three quarters of which have been printed since 1860. Many of these families might better be called clans or tribes, so numerous is their membership. Thus of the Northampton Lyman family there were living, when the family genealogy was published in 1872, more than four thousand persons. When some American Galton desires in the next century to study hereditary genius or character under a democracy, he will find ready to his hand an enormous mass of material. There are in the United States one hundred and forty-eight historical societies, most of them recently established, which give a large share of their attention to biography, genealogy, necrology, and kindred topics. Persons and families of local note, the settlement and development of new towns, and the rise of new industries are commemorated by these societies, which are accumulating and preserving materials for the philosophical historian who shall hereafter describe the social condition

of a democracy which in a hundred years overran the habitable parts of a continent.

Two things are necessary to family permanence, — education and bodily vigor, in every generation. To secure these two things, the holding and the transmission of moderate properties in families must be so well provided for by law and custom as to be possible for large numbers of families. For the objects in view, great properties are not so desirable as moderate or even small properties, since the transmission of health and education with great properties is not so sure as with small properties. It is worth while to inquire, therefore, what has been accomplished under the reign of the American democracy in the way of making the holding and the transmission of small properties possible. In the first place, safe investments for moderate sums have been greatly multiplied and made accessible, as every trustee knows. Great trust-investment companies have been created expressly to hold money safely, and make it yield a sure though small income. The savings-bank and the insurance company have been brought to every man's door, the latter insuring against almost every kind of disaster to which property and earning capacity are liable. Life insurance has been regulated and fostered, with the result of increasing materially the stability of households and the chances of transmitting education in families. Through these and other agencies it has been made more probable that widows and orphans will inherit property, and easier for them to hold property securely, — a very important point in connection with the permanence of families, as may be strikingly illustrated by the single statement that eighteen per cent of the students in Harvard College have no fathers living. Many new employments have been opened to women, who have thus been enabled more easily to hold families together and educate their children. Finally, society has been saved in great measure from war and revolution, and from the fear of these calamities; and thus family property, as well as happiness, has been rendered more secure.

The holding and the transmission of property in families

are, however, only means to two ends; namely, education and health in successive generations. From the first, the American democracy recognized the fact that education was of supreme importance to it,—the elementary education for all, the higher for all the naturally selected; but it awakened much later to the necessity of attending to the health of the people. European aristocracies have always secured themselves in a measure against physical degeneration by keeping a large proportion of their men in training as soldiers and sportsmen, and most of their women at ease in country seats. In our democratic society, which at first thought only of work and production, it is to be observed that public attention is directed more and more to the means of preserving and increasing health and vigor. Some of these means are country schools for city children, country or seaside houses for families, public parks and gardens, out-of-door sports, systematic physical training in schools and colleges, vacations for business and professional men, and improvements in the dwellings and the diet of all classes. Democracy leaves marriages and social groups to be determined by natural affiliation or congeniality of tastes and pursuits, which is the effective principle in the association of cultivated persons under all forms of government. So far from having any quarrel with the law of hereditary transmission, it leaves the principle of heredity perfectly free to act; but it does not add to the natural sanctions of that principle an unnecessary bounty of privileges conferred by law.

From this consideration of the supposed conflict between democracy and the law of heredity the transition is easy to my last topic; namely, the effect of democratic institutions on the production of ladies and gentlemen. There can be no question that a general amelioration of manners is brought about in a democracy by public schools, democratic churches, public conveyances without distinction of class, universal suffrage, town-meetings, and all the multifarious associations in which democratic society delights; but this general ameliora-

tion might exist, and yet the highest types of manners might fail. Do these fail? On this important point American experience is already interesting, and I think conclusive. Forty years ago Emerson said it was a chief felicity of our country that it excelled in women. It excels more and more. Who has not seen in public and in private life American women unsurpassable in grace and graciousness, in serenity and dignity, in effluent gladness and abounding courtesy? Now, the lady is the consummate fruit of human society at its best. In all the higher walks of American life there are men whose bearing and aspect at once distinguish them as gentlemen. They have personal force, magnanimity, moderation, and refinement; they are quick to see and to sympathize; they are pure, brave, and firm. These are also the qualities that command success; and herein lies the only natural connection between the possession of property and nobility of character. In a mobile or free society the excellent or noble man is likely to win ease and independence; but it does not follow that under any form of government the man of many possessions is necessarily excellent. On the evidence of my reading and of my personal observation at home and abroad, I fully believe that there is a larger proportion of ladies and gentlemen in the United States than in any other country. This proposition is, I think, true with the highest definition of the term "lady" or "gentleman;" but it is also true, if ladies and gentlemen are only persons who are clean and well-dressed, who speak gently and eat with their forks. It is unnecessary, however, to claim any superiority for democracy in this respect; enough that the highest types of manners in men and women are produced abundantly on democratic soil.

It would appear then from American experience that neither generations of privileged ancestors, nor large inherited possessions, are necessary to the making of a lady or a gentleman. What is necessary? In the first place, natural gifts. The gentleman is *born* in a democracy, no less than in a monarchy. In other words, he is a person of fine bodily and spiritual

qualities, mostly innate. Secondly, he must have through elementary education early access to books, and therefore to great thoughts and high examples. Thirdly, he must be early brought into contact with some refined and noble person, — father, mother, teacher, pastor, employer, or friend. These are the only necessary conditions in peaceful times and in law-abiding communities like ours. Accordingly, such facts as the following are common in the United States: One of the numerous children of a small farmer manages to fit himself for college, works his way through college, becomes a lawyer, at forty is a much-trusted man in one of the chief cities of the Union, and is distinguished for the courtesy and dignity of his bearing and speech. The son of a country blacksmith is taught and helped to a small college by his minister; he himself becomes a minister, has a long fight with poverty and ill-health, but at forty-five holds as high a place as his profession affords, and every line in his face and every tone in his voice betoken the gentleman. The sons and daughters of a successful shopkeeper take the highest places in the most cultivated society of their native place, and well deserve the pre-eminence accorded to them. The daughter of a man of very imperfect education, who began life with nothing and became a rich merchant, is singularly beautiful from youth to age, and possesses to the highest degree the charm of dignified and gracious manners. A young girl, not long out of school, the child of respectable but obscure parents, marries a public man, and in conspicuous station bears herself with a grace, discretion, and nobleness which she could not have exceeded had her blood been royal for seven generations. Striking cases of this kind will occur to every person in this assembly. They are every-day phenomena in American society. What conclusion do they establish? They prove that the social mobility of a democracy, which permits the excellent and well-endowed of either sex to rise and to seek out each other, and which gives every advantageous variation or sport in a family stock free opportunity to develop, is immeasurably more beneficial to a na-

tion than any selective in-breeding, founded on class distinctions, which has ever been devised. Since democracy has every advantage for producing in due season and proportion the best human types, it is reasonable to expect that science and literature, music and art, and all the finer graces of society will develop and thrive in America, as soon as the more urgent tasks of subduing a wilderness and organizing society upon an untried plan are fairly accomplished.

Such are some of the reasons drawn from experience for believing that our ship of state is stout and sound; but she sails —

"... the sea
Of storm-engendering liberty,"

the happiness of the greatest number her destined haven. Her safety requires incessant watchfulness and readiness. Without trusty eyes on the look-out, and a prompt hand at the wheel, the stoutest ship may be dismantled by a passing squall. It is only intelligence and discipline which carry the ship to its port.

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